

John M. Flanders Testimony to Committee on Children
on S.B. 2
March 9, 2021

Chairs Linehan and Anwar, Ranking Members Martin and Dauphinais, Members of the Committee, I am speaking today as a parent and member of the Board of Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut. My testimony is primarily concerned with the provision beginning in Section 25 to change the State's Birth to Three program to one covering students who do not otherwise qualify for special education from birth through 5. We are cautiously in support the concept of this change, but with significant , and recommend that it not pass without certain amendments. While we appreciate a new mechanism to provide services for young children with disabilities we are very concerned about the possible impact on student's eligibility for special ed.

As practitioners in special education we are acutely aware of the challenges faced by families with children with disabilities when those children reach age three and must transit from birth to three to special education. The family friendly Individual Family Service Plan abruptly changes to an educationally focused Individual Education Program with substantially different expectations and therefore services and programs.

Further, we understand the requirement to address the needs of pre-school aged children imposes responsibilities that may not be in the wheel house of local school systems. In districts where universal preschool is not offered it requires the establishment of programs that would not meet the criteria for the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in normal circumstances. We see students being forced into "special ed preschools" when they may better served at home or in a venue with a greater number of typical peers.

The changes in the Birth to Three model proposed in section 25 show potential to address these concerns. For these reasons we are not necessarily opposed to this step. However we see issues that we hope have been considered to be able to implement the change effectively.

The first and most obvious concern is that families whose children require special education may be lured into less appropriate programs because the IFSP option seems more comfortable, and may even include more hours of services, rather than a program better designed to meet the need of the student to be ready to participate in education when they become old enough for kindergarten. We are concerned that this change will encourage schools to find students not eligible for special education, with the expectation that the student would receive some, but possibly not all the appropriate services.

Not enjoying the requirements of special education during the two years may tend to hamper the identification of a student when he or she is ready for kindergarten. For example the student be denied the process of establishing present levels of performance that will help establish the educational needs for the kindergarten year.

Further, parents could be told that their children had already been found not eligible for special ed at age three implying that they would be not eligible at age 5.

For these reasons we propose that the section not be approved unless it is amended to include requirement for information exchange between the Birth to Five programs and the Local Educational Authority. A reasonable approach to achieving this would be to require the LEA to conduct a PPT Meeting once each year during the age three to five period to determine if the child is eligible for special education services.

We appreciate the Committee's attention to our concerns, and are happy to answer any questions you may have.

